

Too Close, Close or Not Close Enough?

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It is incidental that I had been mulling over this issue after meeting a student around the same time as reading the notification for TMF. It did not take me a lot of time to figure out what issue I wanted to raise. You see, Teacher-Student Relationship is what I want to be focussing on here.

The purpose of this article is not so much that of seeking a closure as that of rousing interest in the topic and making educators look upon their relationship with students beyond the classroom manna. What would you do if a student came to you with a personal problem? In my brief span in this field, I have seen a broad range of treatments of this situation...and often ones that cause more damage rather than help to the concerned party. So let's be back to the original question – what does one do when a student seeks advice on a topic that goes beyond the syllabus boundaries? One of the responses could be of an ego massage...of course, a fillip to the self-confidence of the teacher who has been bestowed the trust of the student; another could be of a feigned interest; if the student is lucky, even genuine interest may exist; or there may be derision of the student's attempt to breach the protocol and professional boundaries....really!

And then there are some educators, who do not understand the gap between close and very close, and rudeness and legitimate discouragement. Let's examine the content of the student's problem....what would happen if one, the problem is purely familial, or two, the problem relates to the student's relationship with his classmates or other members of his learning environment. What happens when there are other common stakeholders in the picture? Suddenly, it is not too easy to evaluate situations and people without adding one's one preconceived notions and experiential learning to the whole listening and understanding game, is it?

And what happens when the student's rant is over? One of the smartest things to do is not to reveal it to anybody...not in front of a fellow teacher or students from same or different batches. But that would seem pretty obvious, won't it? Unfortunately, student stories are often gossip fodder or used for prejudicial decision making or when the situations are taken too personally it perpetually changes our perception based on the student's experience.

Ever so often, there are whispers of things that we would want to sweep under the carpets of morality. Instances of breaching the limits of teacher-student relationships inappropriately, teachers indulging in more intimacy than the models of the profession and making lives of their students, hot topics for brunches are so around us. And this is perhaps the right time for a deeper introspection as to what beliefs we have about our roles with respect to our students and the power of our deeds and words in the lives of our students.